

**Texas Department of Health  
Commissioner's Report to the Board of Health  
April 6, 2001**

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**Office of the Deputy Commissioner for Administration**

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The **Lab Building Project** construction documents for the final package to be competitively bid (site work, landscaping, and signage) are 90% complete and will be advertised in early spring. Brickwork will begin this month. A total of thirty days' float has been built into the project schedule. Ten days of float were lost in the month of February due to inclement weather. Thus, completion of the project remains on schedule at the present time. As of March 5th, Legislative Leadership has not responded to our letter asking their approval of our plan to cover construction cost increases. General Services Commission's (GSC) executive management has decided it is not prudent for them to make further inquiries at this point in time. As of March 5th, trade contractor pricing on change orders for seventh floor finish-out work is still in tact and work has not been delayed. However, fixed pricing for work in which they still have not received a formal notice to proceed from GSC is now subject to change at any time. As soon as we get an answer from Legislative leadership, Gilbane (our construction management company) will provide a formal, revised schedule for completion of the project. If an answer is not forthcoming, a decision must be made very soon to either delay the project or proceed without finishing out the 7th floor. *For more information contact Tim Horn, Lab Office/Building Project (512) 458-7780 or e-mail at [Tim.Horn@tdh.state.tx.us](mailto:Tim.Horn@tdh.state.tx.us).*

The **Health and Human Services Administrative Systems (HHSAS) Project reached** a major project milestone during February with the approval by the Chief Financial Officer (CFO), Change Control Board (CCB) and Steering Committee of all HHSAS recommendations from the Enterprise Work Group Sessions. The approval process by the CFO, CCB and Steering Committee is 2 phased. Phase 1 approval authorized EpicEdge to move forward with the modification detailed design work. During Phase 2 the detailed designs will be presented for final approval to the CFO CCB and Steering Committee. With less involvement of the HHSAS Team with the Enterprise agencies the focus has shifted to the Texas Department of Health/Health and Human Services Commission (TDH/HHSC) implementation. The HHSAS Team is working on prototyping, training and change management plans, conversion and interface designs and other project related tasks. An e-mail address has been established to answer any question about HHSAS and a HHSAS Web Page will be available in the near future to provide project information to TDH and HHSC staff. *For more information contact Linda Schirpik, Project Manager, Administrative Systems Project (512) 458-7503 or e-mail at [Linda.Schirpik@tdh.state.tx.us](mailto:Linda.Schirpik@tdh.state.tx.us).*

The **Legislative Appropriations Process final update** to the Texas Department of Health's Legislative Appropriations Request was April 1<sup>st</sup>. *For more information contact*

Kathleen Barnett, Budget & Revenue Division (512) 458-7485 or e-mail at [Kathleen.Barnett@tdh.state.tx.us](mailto:Kathleen.Barnett@tdh.state.tx.us).

The **Information Technology Refresh for the Regions**, both Desktop Personal Computers and Public Health Region Regional Network standards groups met March 7th for a final review of proposed policy. The task of identifying all regional equipment three years and old continues. *For more information contact Kevin Judd, Special Projects/Systems Analyst (512) 458-711, ext. 6123 or e-mail at [Kevin.Judd@tdh.state.tx.us](mailto:Kevin.Judd@tdh.state.tx.us).*

Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) staff visited the Texas Department of Health (TDH) in the fourth week of March for the review of the second year of the **Bioterrorism Grant** including the Health Alert Network (HAN) grant. Preliminary conversations indicate favorable response from CDC. It also appears that there will be a third year for the CDC grant. The **Bell County Distance Learning Center** contract was signed. TDH will be bringing in regional volunteers for four days of distance learning skills training within the next month. TDH and University of Texas (UT) are considering the feasibility of partnering with the United States Defense Threat Reduction Agency, a part of the defense department, to deploy web-based software to model bioterrorism scenarios and other biological threats to public health. This software interface could include more sensitive biological sensors similar in concept to those used by the military as well as Geographic Information Standards (GIS) based environmental forecasting agents. If feasible these tools could allow local health departments to accurately predict the effects of local environmental conditions of chemical and biological agents. CDC and Telecommunications Infrastructure Fund Board (TIFB) funded equipment for distance learning/video equipment for regional health offices has been submitted to TDH purchasing. TDH is expecting to use Southwestern Bell Communications (SBC) video conferencing scheduling services pending implementation of the TEXAN 2000 video conferencing service. UT Tyler has offered the use of its microwave-based network to assist in HAN deployment in east Texas. Texas Rural Hospital Telecommunications Alliance and Texas Association of Local Health Officials deployment agent, will be looking at the use of this microwave capability to assist HAN deployment. TDH is in conversation with officials at the Mary Hardin Baylor College of Medicine to develop web based training programs for bioterrorism. *For more information contact Mark Harrison, Director of Operations (512) 458-7111, ext. 6067 or e-mail at [Mark.Harrison@tdh.state.tx.us](mailto:Mark.Harrison@tdh.state.tx.us).*

We are **developing a list of potential e-government projects** and tasks based on introduced legislation. This list is dynamic as proposed legislation is amended. Specific issues include to the required telecommunications infrastructure, Medicaid and public assistance program enrollment via Internet, privacy and confidentiality requirements, telehealth/telemedicine, personal information and electronic commerce (electronic procurement). *For more information contact Joe Schriever, E-Government Coordinator, at (512) 458-7738 or e-mail at [Joe.Schriever@tdh.state.tx.us](mailto:Joe.Schriever@tdh.state.tx.us).*

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**Associateship for Community Dynamics & Prevention Strategies**

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The final report on **"The Economic Impact of Cancer in Texas"**, funded by the TDH Comprehensive Cancer Grant, and authored by Dr. David Warner, et al from the UT-LBJ School of Public Affairs was submitted to TDH at the end of February. The major finding was that the annual financial burden of cancer on the state is almost \$14 billion annually – compared to the \$4 billion annual figure that has been used for some time.

This study estimated costs based on data from 1998, and calculates estimated direct medical costs (\$4.8 billion) and estimated indirect cost from lost productivity (\$9.1 billion), for a total of \$13.9 billion attributable to cancer. The economic burden on the state due to lost productivity is higher than for other leading causes of death, since cancer affects people during their prime wage-earning years. The report uses available data on colorectal, lung, breast, and prostate cancers and breaks out costs by Public Health Region wherever possible. *For more information please contact Ms. Anne Williamson, Director, Adult Health Programs at (512) 458-7534, or e-mail [Anne.Williamson@tdh.state.tx.us](mailto:Anne.Williamson@tdh.state.tx.us).*

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## **Border Health**

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The Office of Border Health is pleased to announce that it has expanded its toll free **1-800 telephone service to Tamaulipas, Nuevo Leon, Coahuila, and Chihuahua, the 4 Mexican states** that share the border with Texas. This initiative is the direct result of efforts to address the high cost of international phone service. It is expected that the relatively low cost toll free 1-800 telephone service will help **eliminate barriers to communications** between the state capitals and local and state public health officials in the sister-cities along the Texas-Mexico border. This initiative was made possible with federal funds specifically earmarked for use in Mexico by the US-Mexico Border Health Commission. Computers and dedicated Internet connections are part of the next phase of this TDH Border Health Priority Initiative. *For more information please contact Dr. R. J. Dutton, Director, Office of Border Health at (512) 458-7675, or e-mail [RJ.Dutton@tdh.state.tx.us](mailto:RJ.Dutton@tdh.state.tx.us).*

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## **Family Planning**

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**School Health Advisory Committee (SHAC)** will meet jointly with the School Health Network regional health specialists funded by Texas Cancer Council (TCC) and the Texas Department of Health (TDH) on April 19<sup>th</sup>. SHAC currently is looking at other states for models of "best practices" in school health. A draft action plan for Texas will be discussed at the April 19<sup>th</sup> meeting. Accepting nominations/applications for vacancies in the following positions: school administrator, consumer(s), physician, and registered nurse. *For more information contact Michelle McComb at (512) 458-7111, ext. 3507 or e-mail at [michelle.mccomb@tdh.state.tx.us](mailto:michelle.mccomb@tdh.state.tx.us).*

**The Take Time for Kids** program was recently honored with an award from the National Honorary Extension Fraternity, Epsilon Sigma Phi, for outstanding public service and collaboration with Texas A&M University Extension Service. The partnership with A&M Extension began in 1998 to develop and implement a system of community education programs to promote child health and safety. We are honored to announce that the Take Time for Kids has also received recognition in the past for outstanding program implementation: Outstanding Leadership award (1997) presented by Advocates for Infants and Children in **Denton** for fostering parenting education and making children a priority; Texas A&M Extension (1999) Partnership for collaborative efforts with Extension and impacting the quality of life of Texans; and nominated (1998) by the Commissioner of TDH for the Association of State and Territorial Health Officials award. *For more information contact Jere Brewer at (512) 458-7700 or e-mail at [jere.brewer@tdh.state.tx.us](mailto:jere.brewer@tdh.state.tx.us).*

TDH is implementing the **Texas Traumatic Brain Injury Project (TBIP)** with a grant from the Maternal and Child Health Bureau of the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services. The primary purpose of the Project is to address barriers that impede access to appropriate services and supports for persons with traumatic brain injury and their families. TDH is undertaking this effort in partnership with the Texas Traumatic Brain Injury Advisory Council, the Health and Human Services Commission, consumers, advocacy organizations, service providers and relevant state agencies to implement the TBI project.

To address traumatic brain injury issues, Texas intends to increase the array of services available for persons with traumatic brain injury from acute services through long-term services. Major goals of the Texas TBI project are: (1) identification of persons with traumatic brain injury; (2) increasing access to appropriate services in order to maximize the subsequent functioning of individuals who experience traumatic brain injury; and (3) providing the information and education needed by TBI stakeholders. Although attention will be given to prevention and acute care services, the focus of the project is improving the coordinated array of long-term services and supports available for persons with traumatic brain injury and their families *For more information contact Lesa Walker at (512) 458-7111, ext. 3567 or e-mail at [lesa.walker@tdh.state.tx.us](mailto:lesa.walker@tdh.state.tx.us).*

**The Family Planning Division in the Bureau of Women's Health submitted a competitive application for family planning services December 1, 2000 to DHHS, Office of Family Planning for Region VI.** The Division recently received a notice of grant award for \$11.4 million. The TDH Family Planning Division was awarded funds through 3-31-06 for the provision of family planning services under the Title X Coordinated Family Planning Project. Approximately 90% of the Title X funds will be awarded to non-profit and public agencies during the competitive coordinated RFP process for FY 02. *For more information contact Cindy Jones at (512) 458-7111, ext. 2025 or e-mail at [cindy.jones@tdh.state.tx.us](mailto:cindy.jones@tdh.state.tx.us).*

TDH has obtained a copy of a draft appropriations bill rider that would require the WIC program to run a 2<sup>nd</sup> **Electronic Benefits Transfer (EBT) pilot** using a magnetic strip system in addition to the WIC smartcard pilot currently under development. If the rider

comes to fruition, the 2<sup>nd</sup> pilot is estimated to cost between \$3 and \$4 million to develop and TDH would become the project leader for the EBT online project; TDH would transfer a minimum of \$250 thousand to DHS for consultants; TDH would be responsible for all of TDH's development costs; TDH would be responsible for all of the TDHS/NIC related staff costs; TDH/TDHS would have to do a cost benefit analysis of the two types of pilots (Off-line smartcard vs. on-line magnetic strip) and report results to the State's EBT Task Force; the EBT task force would set standards for any statewide rollout of either WIC EBT system; USDA prior approval would have to be obtained if federal WIC grant monies were expended on this pilot; the rider has GR funds implications for TDH. *For more information contact Ray Krzesniak at (512) 458-7111, ext. 3471 or e-mail at [ray.krzesniak@tdh.state.tx.us](mailto:ray.krzesniak@tdh.state.tx.us).*

The Bureau of Nutrition Services submitted an **Infrastructure Grant Application** of USDA for \$1.5 million to be used to reimburse grocers in the El Paso WIC Smartcard pilot for needed equipment conversion. The Smartcard pilot is currently targeted for February, 2002. . *For more information contact Ray Krzesniak at (512) 458-7111, ext. 3471 or e-mail at [ray.krzesniak@tdh.state.tx.us](mailto:ray.krzesniak@tdh.state.tx.us).*

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## **Bureau of Communicable Disease Control**

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Meningitis an inflammation of the covering of the brain can be caused by viruses, parasites, fungi, and bacteria. Approximately one person in every 100,000 is expected to develop meningitis or a bloodstream infection with the bacteria *N meningitidis* (i.e., meningococcal infections) each year. Only one of the four serogroups that cause disease, serogroup C, has a tendency to cause outbreaks in the US. When 10 cases of one serogroup occur in a population of 100,000 during a three-month period, the CDC and the Advisory Committee on Immunization Practices recommend immunizing the population at risk. This occurred in the **Gregg County** area in 1994-1996 and, during December and January, rates sufficient to warrant vaccination have occurred in the **New Caney/Porter** area (5 pediatric serogroup C cases in a population of approximately 5,000), **Conroe** (4 serogroup C cases aged 1-80 in a population of 40,000) and on one **Humble** junior high/high school campus (2 serogroup C cases in student body of 3,500). *For more information contact Neil Pascoe, Nurse Epidemiologist, Infectious Disease Epidemiology & Surveillance Division, at (512) 458-7676, or e-mail [neil.pascoe@tdh.state.tx.us](mailto:neil.pascoe@tdh.state.tx.us).*

The **Bloodborne Pathogen rules** (HB 2085) went into effect 1/1/01. The Texas Department of Health (TDH) is currently completing its Exposure Control Plan to be in compliance with the requirements. TDH Infectious Disease staff has made presentations to representatives of affected governmental units across the state. Additional presentations are planned to include all Public Health Regions. Electronic reporting of contaminated sharps injuries required under the rules is not operational at this time. Efforts are being made to accelerate the process. *For more information contact Neil Pascoe, Nurse Epidemiologist, Infectious Disease Epidemiology & Surveillance Division at (512) 458-7676, or e-mail [neil.pascoe@tdh.state.tx.us](mailto:neil.pascoe@tdh.state.tx.us).*

Data from the just completed **Texas Neural Tube Defect Project** is now ready for analysis. From June 1995-May 2000, 190 women who had NTD (Neural Tube Defects)-affected pregnancies and 232 women who had given birth to infants without NTDs participated in interviews regarding their health, demographics, reproductive history, diet, and environment. The participants also permitted blood, urine, and other specimens to be collected for laboratory analysis. Investigation has begun on the effect of various risk factors such as periconceptional folic acid supplementation, hyperinsulinemia, serum B12 and iron levels, stress, and antibiotic use. TDH epidemiologists will be preparing manuscripts of their findings for publication. *For more information contact Marilyn Felkner, Staff Epidemiologist, Infectious Disease Epidemiology & Surveillance Division at (512) 458-7676, or e-mail [marilyn.felkner@tdh.state.tx.us](mailto:marilyn.felkner@tdh.state.tx.us).*

The **Texas TB Coalition** met in Austin on January 12. Coalition members discussed ways to heighten awareness of tuberculosis among decision makers and the general public. *For more information contact Charles Wallace, TB Elimination Division at (512) 458-7447 or e-mail [charles.wallace@tdh.state.tx.us](mailto:charles.wallace@tdh.state.tx.us).*

The **Blue Ribbon Committee** on Childhood Tuberculosis met in Austin on January 18. The committee was assembled from the state's top experts in pediatric tuberculosis management. Members of the committee reviewed a concept document on screening for tuberculosis in school settings and drafted a proposed questionnaire to use to screen for risk of tuberculosis infection as part of a two-tiered system to be used in schools that choose to establish a screening program for tuberculosis infection. *For more information contact Charles Wallace, TB Elimination Division at (512) 458-7447 or e-mail [charles.wallace@tdh.state.tx.us](mailto:charles.wallace@tdh.state.tx.us).*

An open house was held to kick-off the **national UV light study in homeless shelters** on February 14 and 16 in **Houston** and **Brownsville**. This project will study the effect of placing UV lights in homeless shelters on the transmission of TB among clients who use the shelters. *For more information contact Charles Wallace, TB Elimination Division at (512) 458-7447 or e-mail [charles.wallace@tdh.state.tx.us](mailto:charles.wallace@tdh.state.tx.us).*

Charles Wallace was elected president of the **National TB Controllers Association**. *For more information contact Charles Wallace, TB Elimination Division at (512) 458-7447 or e-mail [charles.wallace@tdh.state.tx.us](mailto:charles.wallace@tdh.state.tx.us).*

In 2000 according to preliminary data received by the Tuberculosis Elimination Division, 1,506 **cases of TB** were reported in Texas. This is a 9% decrease from the 1,649 cases counted in year 1999. The case count for year 2000 is over 1,000 cases fewer than the 2,542 cases reported in 1994. **Public Health Region 4/5** showed the largest decrease (21%) in the number of cases from 1999 to 2000. **Regions 1 and 11** showed increases of 11% and 6%, respectively. *For more information contact Jeff Taylor, TB Elimination Division at (512) 458-7447 or e-mail [jeff.taylor@tdh.state.tx.us](mailto:jeff.taylor@tdh.state.tx.us).*



During November and December, there were no cases of **canine rabies** in South Texas. In West-Central Texas, there were 3 cases of gray fox rabies in the following counties: **Kimble County** (1 fox), **Brewster** (1 fox), and **Runnels** (1 fox). To date, no cases of gray fox rabies have been reported beyond the boundaries of the original ORVP drop-zone for gray foxes. On February 21, an 11-month-old Rotweiler tested positive for the **canine strain of rabies virus**. This is the first case of canine rabies in South Texas since September, 1999. The dog resided in a small, unincorporated subdivision in **Webb County** less than 15 miles northwest of **Laredo** and within 5 miles of the border with Mexico. The dog was allowed to roam loose and came in contact with several other unvaccinated, free-roaming dogs. During January, as part of the ongoing Oral Rabies Vaccination Program, oral rabies vaccine baits targeting coyotes (a reservoir species for this canine strain of rabies in South Texas) were distributed at 70 baits per square mile in a 40-mile-wide zone along the Rio Grande River which included Webb County. This case emphasizes the need for continued vigilance by public health and animal control authorities in areas vulnerable to the introduction of canine rabies. Rabies vaccination of domestic dogs, control of unvaccinated stray dogs, and maintaining a barrier zone of immunized coyotes have proven effective for controlling the South Texas canine rabies epizootic that began in 1988, but the efforts by pet owners, animal control authorities and public health officials must continue until the threat of reintroduction is eliminated. *For more information contact "Skip" Oertli at (512) 458-7255 or e-mail [ernest.oertli@tdh.state.tx.us](mailto:ernest.oertli@tdh.state.tx.us).*

**Skunk rabies** continues to increase in parts of north and central Texas, with an associated increase in public awareness and media attention. In 2000, there were 550 skunk samples positive for rabies. This compares to a yearly average of 129 for the previous ten years. The increase in rabies positive skunks appears to parallel an increase in the skunk population and an increase in the number of laboratory submissions (heightened awareness results in more submissions). In the first two months of 2001 there have been 136 positive skunks, a 183% increase over last year's number of 74 for the same period. A review of reports shows that last year (2000) had the highest number of rabies positive skunks since 1980, but is not the highest year on record. If 2000 represents the beginning of a 20-year cycle of skunk rabies, then it might be expected that the numbers will remain high for the next few years. For more information contact Joe Garrett at (512) 458-7255 or e-mail [joe.garrett@tdh.state.tx.us](mailto:joe.garrett@tdh.state.tx.us).

A case of **typhoid fever** in an 18-month-old child was reported in **Fort Worth**. The family reports no travel and no foodhandlers. The child does not attend daycare and is just starting table foods. The local health department is testing family members and checking into visiting family members as a potential source of infection. *For more information contact Linda Gaul, Staff Epidemiologist, Infectious Disease Epidemiology & Surveillance Division at (512) 458-7676 or e-mail [linda.gaul@tdh.state.tx.us](mailto:linda.gaul@tdh.state.tx.us).*

Approximately 230 elementary school children in **Tarrant County** became ill with a suspected **foodborne illness**. None were ill enough to seek medical care. Laboratory specimens from recently ill patients are being analyzed, but no pathogens have yet been identified. Food samples are being tested by a private laboratory. Completed food history questionnaires have been collected for 175 affected children. *For more*

information contact Linda Gaul, Staff Epidemiologist, Infectious Disease Epidemiology & Surveillance Division at (512) 458-7676 or e-mail [linda.gaul@tdh.state.tx.us](mailto:linda.gaul@tdh.state.tx.us).

**Tarrant County** reported that nine junior high school students on a band field trip became ill within one hour of eating at a fast food chain. A total of 20 students ate at the same establishment at the same time. The primary symptom was vomiting. Members of the local health department are attempting to obtain clinical samples. The school reports that 280 students were on the field trip, but only this cohort from the band ate at the same establishment and only this cohort had any ill students. *For more information contact Linda Gaul, Staff Epidemiologist, Infectious Disease Epidemiology & Surveillance Division at (512) 458-7676 or e-mail [linda.gaul@tdh.state.tx.us](mailto:linda.gaul@tdh.state.tx.us).*

**El Paso City-County** reported 27 ill adults that had attended an alumni dinner held Friday, February 23. There were a total of 40 persons at the dinner. Of these, 29 have been interviewed. The onset of symptoms occurred on average 27 hours after the dinner. The symptoms in order of presentation include diarrhea (24/27), nausea (18/27), vomiting (15/27). Bacteriology samples so far are negative; **viral gastroenteritis** is suspected. *For more information contact Linda Gaul, Staff Epidemiologist, Infectious Disease Epidemiology & Surveillance Division at (512) 458-7676 or e-mail [linda.gaul@tdh.state.tx.us](mailto:linda.gaul@tdh.state.tx.us).*

The seroprevalence of **hepatitis C** in the population using the HIV/STD clinics hovers around 12%. Data from 6 of the 8 blood and tissue centers statewide on autologous blood donors shows a prevalence of 2.6%. The prevalence found for insured people in the general population is about 1%. There were 10,647 newly diagnosed cases of HCV (acute plus chronic) reported to TDH for the first half of 2000. *For more information contact Gary Heseltine, Infectious Disease Epidemiology & Surveillance Division at (512) 458-7676 or e-mail [gary.heseltine@tdh.state.tx.us](mailto:gary.heseltine@tdh.state.tx.us).*

**An article on hepatitis C** and the state's activities appeared in the March 2001 issue of *Texas Medicine*; the forthcoming issue of *Osteopathic Medicine* will carry a similar feature. A 1-800 Hepatitis information number will be rolled out in May; with local and regional health departments providing backup information to callers. Hepatitis C presentations were made to more than 200 school children in the **Austin area**, including Crockett High School and Gardner-Betts juvenile facility. Hepatitis C radio and TV commercials, featuring a Grammy-award winner are scheduled for production tomorrow. The design of a pre- and post-survey to evaluate the campaign is in final drafts for translations. The Council of State Governments, Suggested State Legislation Committee 2001, announced they have adopted Texas Bill 1652 as model legislation on Hepatitis C. They have put it in print to all 50 states. *For more information contact Gary Heseltine, Infectious Disease Epidemiology & Surveillance Division at (512) 458-7676 or e-mail [gary.heseltine@tdh.state.tx.us](mailto:gary.heseltine@tdh.state.tx.us).*

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**Bureau of Epidemiology**

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An evaluation of the information management and process issues that impact the **Texas Cancer Registry's** (TCR) data timeliness and quality was completed by Vector Research, Inc. To continue with the efforts to improve the TCR's ability to provide complete, timely, and quality cancer data, members of the Cancer Registry Work Group, a steering committee for the TCR, with input from other state cancer registry experts will prioritize recommendations from the report and provide cost estimates. This will help with establishing short-range and long-range goals for the TCR to become a nationally certified cancer registry eligible for additional federal funding. *For more information contact Nancy Weiss, Cancer Registry Division at (512) 458-7523 or e-mail [nancy.weiss@tdh.state.tx.us](mailto:nancy.weiss@tdh.state.tx.us).*

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## **Bureau of Laboratories**

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Effective January 24, Susan U. Neil, Ph.D., M.B.A. has been named as **Acting Bureau Chief for the Bureau of Laboratories.** Dr. Neill has a Ph.D. in Microbiology from the University of Illinois and has been employed by the Texas Department of Health since 1987. She has served as Division Director of the Biochemistry and Genetics Division in the Bureau of Laboratories since 1999. *For more information contact Susan N. Neill, Bureau of Laboratories (512) 458-7318 or e-mail [susan.neill@tdh.state.tx.us](mailto:susan.neill@tdh.state.tx.us).*

Eldridge Hutcheson, Ph.D., has been named as **Acting Division Director for the Biochemistry and Genetics Division.** Doctor Hutcheson has a Ph.D. in Chemistry from the University of Texas. He has been with TDH since 1994 as Supervisor of the Clinical Chemistry Branch in the Bureau of Laboratories. *For more information contact Eldridge Hutcheson, Bureau of Laboratories (512) 458-7430 or e-mail [Eldridge.Hutcheson@tdh.state.tx.us](mailto:Eldridge.Hutcheson@tdh.state.tx.us).*

The Rabies Laboratory received **8732 animal heads** for testing during 2000. The number of animal heads received in 2000 represents a **24.7% increase** over the number received in 1999 (n=7004). Of the 8506 specimens that were tested for rabies, 740 (8.7%) were positive. The number of positive heads identified in 2000 represents a **102% increase** over the number of positive heads identified in 1999 (n=367). The number of skunks tested for rabies in 2000 constituted 13.1% (1117/8506) of the total specimens tested. However, the number of skunks testing positive for rabies constituted was 68.4% (506/740) of the total number of specimens identified as positive. *For more information contact Pushker Raj, Microbiological Services Division (512) 458-7491 or e-mail [pushker.raj@tdh.state.tx.us](mailto:pushker.raj@tdh.state.tx.us).*

In January the Newborn Screening Branch analyzed **65,977 newborn screening specimens.** There were 329,885 tests performed to complete the battery of screening for five different disorders on each specimen. *For more information contact Eldridge T. Hutcheson, Acting Director, Biochemistry and Genetics Division at (512) 458-7430 or e-mail [eldridge.hutcheson@tdh.state.tx.us](mailto:eldridge.hutcheson@tdh.state.tx.us).*

The Clinical Chemistry Branch performed **51,051 tests** on 22,877 **Texas Health Steps and Title V specimens**. *For more information contact Eldridge T. Hutcheson, Acting Director, Biochemistry and Genetics Division at (512) 458-7430 or e-mail [eldridge.hutcheson@tdh.state.tx.us](mailto:eldridge.hutcheson@tdh.state.tx.us)*

**An instrument called Lightcycler** has been received and demonstrated to some of the staff. This instrument performs real-time polymerase chain reaction (PCR). It was purchased with federal bioterrorism funds and will be used to test suspected terrorism samples for the presence of microbes that could be used as a weapon of mass destruction. Daily operations will be more focused on testing samples for hard to culture or hard to identify microbes of public health concern. These microbes might be encephalitis-causing viruses carried by mosquitoes, or pathogenic bacteria in suspected food borne disease cases. *For more information contact Bruce Elliott, Director, Microbiological Services Division (512) 458-7760 or e-mail [bruce.elliott@tdh.state.tx.us](mailto:bruce.elliott@tdh.state.tx.us)*

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## **Bureau of Immunization and Pharmacy Support**

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Although the State of Texas (and especially the Immunization Division) is proud to lay claim to another measles-free year for 2000, we will **not** be so lucky in 2001. On February 16, the Immunization Division was notified of a **suspected measles case** in a 10-month-old Chinese infant, newly adopted by a family from Fort Bend County, who had just arrived in Texas. In fact, this child was taken immediately from the airport to Texas Children's Hospital where the diagnosis of measles was made. Laboratory testing by TDH has confirmed the diagnosis of measles, and a second child adopted from the same orphanage in China is currently symptomatic and being investigated. Approximately 9 babies headed for Texas on February 14, 2001, were on the flight from China to Los Angeles when the Texas case rashed. The parents of almost all were contacted and immune globulin administered within the 72-hour time frame to control the spread of measles. Outbreaks of both measles and varicella were reported in the 2 to 3 orphanages from which the babies came. Regional Epidemiologist, Dr. Huai Lin worked with TDH central office and **Harris County** Health Department to **investigate the case and identify passengers on the flight that might have been exposed**. *For more information contact Jan Pelosi, Immunization Division, (512) 458-7111, ext. 6435 or e-mail [jan.pelosi@tdh.state.tx.us](mailto:jan.pelosi@tdh.state.tx.us)*

Texas continues to experience high levels of **pertussis** morbidity, and in fact has recorded its second pertussis death for 2001. (Two pertussis deaths were also reported in 2000.) The most recent deaths include an infant from **Dallas County** who experienced onset of symptoms February 5 and died four days later. Five additional cases of pertussis were epidemiologically linked to this case including two siblings and three next-door neighbor siblings. The second death occurred on February 18 to a 2-½ month old infant from **Midland**. This case is still under investigation. *For more information contact Jan Pelosi, Immunization Division, (512) 458-7111, ext. 6435 or e-mail [jan.pelosi@tdh.state.tx.us](mailto:jan.pelosi@tdh.state.tx.us)*

Over sixty thousand **Meningiococcal Vaccine Information statements (VIS)** were provided to **Public Health Region 6** to distribute during the mass vaccination effort during the Meningitis outbreak. *For more information contact Clara Taylor, Immunization Division, (512) 458-7111, ext. 6530 or e-mail [clara.taylor@tdh.state.tx.us](mailto:clara.taylor@tdh.state.tx.us).*

Coordinated communication with the Governor's Policy Office for activities and requests for **National Infant Immunization Week (NIIW)** in Texas events to include a Proclamation to be read by the Governor and a Resolution to be signed and read by the Board of Health. NIIW will be held April 22-28. *For more information contact Vivian Harris, Immunization Division, (512) 458-7111, ext. 6420 or e-mail [vivian.harris@tdh.state.tx.us](mailto:vivian.harris@tdh.state.tx.us).*

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## Health Care Quality and Standards

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During February, the Code Enforcement Officer Registration Examination, the Sanitarian Registration Examination, the Fitters and Dispensers of Hearing Instruments Examination, and the Midwifery Examination were given to **insure minimum competency as a means of protecting public health**, in **Bryan College Station and Austin**. *For more information contact Jim Zukowski, Division of Professional Licensing and Certification at (512) 834-6628 or e-mail [Jim.Zukowski@tdh.state.tx.us](mailto:Jim.Zukowski@tdh.state.tx.us).*

The Bureau of Licensing and Compliance's **Enforcement & Investigations Program conducted an Enforcement Workshop** for zone and central Program Administrators involved in surveying and licensure of facilities regulated by TDH, on February 26-27. Significant issues effecting survey, investigation, and enforcement of rules and regulations governing facilities regulated by TDH were addressed. Participants "brainstormed" to resolve problems and make decisions to improve the regulatory process. George Cato, Office of General Counsel, Carol Vetter, Enforcement Director, and other Enforcement staff made presentations. Perhaps the most significant change in the Enforcement process was the decision to include zone Program Administrators as voting members in the committee that makes initial recommendations for enforcement action (revocation of a license, administrative penalties, etc.). Enforcement will utilize zone participation for several purposes, including making conscientious decisions by maximizing the expertise represented in the variety of staff backgrounds, giving a "voice" to those who perform surveys and investigations regarding enforcement action, and Enforcement education of zone staff regarding the legal process. The committee had previously functioned under the name of "Enforcement Action Committee" (EAC); however, it was unanimously **decided to rename the committee the "Enforcement Review Committee" (ERC)**. There are several reasons for renaming the committee, including the fact that TDH currently has another committee with the same acronym. On the final day of the workshop, the reorganized committee participated in review and decision-making regarding an actual enforcement case. *For more information contact Carol Vetter, Enforcement Director at (512) 834-6650, ext. 2690 or e-mail [Carol.Vetter@tdh.state.tx.us](mailto:Carol.Vetter@tdh.state.tx.us).*

**The Bureau of Vital Statistics (BVS) publishes a quarterly newsletter.** The first newsletter was published in the fall of 1997. The target audience includes Local Registrars, County Clerks, Funeral Homes, Hospitals, Justices of the Peace and Midwives. Articles contained in these newsletters consist of explanations of policy and procedural issues involving vital records, notices of upcoming vital statistics conferences and training, analysis of selected vital event statistics, and other items of interest. *For more information contact Debra F. Owens at (512) 458-7366 or email [Debra.Owens@tdh.state.tx.us](mailto:Debra.Owens@tdh.state.tx.us).*

The **FY01 Uncompensated Trauma Care grants** have been awarded. Thirty-two designated Trauma Facilities will each receive a check in the amount of \$2500 from the **EMS and Trauma Care System Account** (911 funds) to help defray the costs of providing un-reimbursed trauma care. *For more information contact Ron Hilliard, Emergency Health Care Systems Team at (512) 834-6700 or e-mail [ron.hilliard@tdh.state.tx.us](mailto:ron.hilliard@tdh.state.tx.us).*

The **final legislative report on the EMS and Trauma Care System Account** was completed and copies mailed to the Governor, Lieutenant Governor, House and Senate Leadership/Committee Chairs, as well as Senator Zaffirini (sponsor of the enacting legislation) and Representatives Glaze and Gallego (both take an interest in EMS issues). The report is also available by contacting the Bureau or through our website at <http://www.tdh.state.tx.us/hcqs/ems/emshome.htm>. *For more information contact Kathryn C. Perkins at (512) 834-6700 or e-mail [kathy.perkins@tdh.state.tx.us](mailto:kathy.perkins@tdh.state.tx.us).*

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## Public Health Region 1

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Child safety seat giveaways were held in Region 1 to commemorate **Child Passenger Safety Week**. Staff members from Public Health Promotion shared passenger safety information with over 800 elementary school students in **Levelland (Hockley County)**, **Littlefield (Lamb County)**, and **Shallowater (Lubbock County)** during the week of February 12-16. Two safety-seat checkpoints were also held in **Lubbock (Lubbock County)** and **Brownfield (Terry County)**—safety seats were examined for approximately 150 children in 85 vehicles, and 60 child safety seats were given away to replace recalled, old, broken, or inappropriate child safety seats. *For more information contact Peggy Johnson at (806) 744-0489 or e-mail [Peggy.Johnson@tdh.state.tx.us](mailto:Peggy.Johnson@tdh.state.tx.us).*

Regional epidemiologists investigated a case of **E coli O157:H7**. A 33-year-old woman in **Pampa (Gray County)** was diagnosed with E coli O157:H7. As a result of the investigation, her food and travel history were obtained, both of which were unremarkable. However, she stated that she was in the process of setting up a dairy and that she ate cereal and milk almost every day. No other family members were diagnosed with the disease. The patient was treated with antibiotics and made a full recovery. This remains an isolated case with an unknown cause. *For more information contact Barry Wilson at (806) 744-0496 or e-mail [Barry.Wilson@tdh.state.tx.us](mailto:Barry.Wilson@tdh.state.tx.us).*

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## Public Health Region 2/3

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Since February's report, **PHR 2/3 now has 72 rabies infected animal cases.** These cases are all skunks except for one bat and two dogs. The dogs were infected with the skunk strain of rabies. The number of rabies-infected cases for calendar year 2001 is twice as much as the number of rabies-infected cases for calendar year 2000. The rabies cases appear to be shifting further south with 21 cases in **Tarrant County** and 30 cases in **Ellis County** reporting the most cases so far. **Denton and Wise Counties** are reporting 14 and 16 cases, respectively.

Zoonosis Control has been busy with **training and presentations stressing the rabies issues** in our Region. PHR 2/3 Zoonosis Control provided rabies information and rabies laws updates at a presentation in **Fort Worth** and held an Animal Control Officer Administrative Class in **Arlington**. A rabies update was given at the Animal Control Coalition and Veterinary Association meeting held in **Arlington**. A Local Rabies Control Authority course was held in **Fort Worth**. A bus tour for people from all over the United States was provided as part of the Human Society of US Expo visited Animal Shelters, Animal Control Facilities, and other **Tarrant County** sites of interest with PHR 2/3 Zoonosis Control Public Health Technician acting as one of the tour guides. Zoonosis Control presented Bite Prevention and Animal Safety programs to Brownies (Girl Scouts) from **Dallas and Tarrant Counties**. Zoonosis Control presented a rabies update and rabies pre-exposure and post exposure information to wildlife rehabilitates from **Tarrant and surrounding counties**. *For more information contact Connie Lindley, Zoonosis Control Program Manager at (817) 264-4921 or e-mail [connie.lindley@tdh.state.tx.us](mailto:connie.lindley@tdh.state.tx.us).*

During February Region 2/3 staff assisted the **Tarrant County** Health Department with an investigation of a **foodborne outbreak** at an elementary school. Over 200 children and teachers out of a population of under 600 became ill over several days with nausea, vomiting, diarrhea and fever. Regional epidemiology staff assisted with specimen collection and shipping, and with coding the food recall questionnaire for data analysis. At the Central Office, Infectious Disease Epidemiology personnel also helped with the investigation, and TDH's Bureau of Laboratories ran lab tests to help determine the cause of the outbreak. Results of the investigation are still pending. *For more information contact Brad Walsh, Regional Epidemiologist at (817) 264-4551 or e-mail [brad.walsh@tdh.state.tx.us](mailto:brad.walsh@tdh.state.tx.us).*

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## Public Health Region 4/5

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Regional staff **participated in a bioterrorism prevention exercise on March 27 and 28.** The exercise involved simulation of the aerosolization of the bacterium that causes the disease tularemia. Regional staff worked with several agencies including the **Smith County Public Health District** in assessing bioterrorism prevention readiness. *For*



more information contact Paul K. McGaha, Regional Director, Public Health Regions 4/5 North at (903) 533-5264 or e-mail at [paul.mcgaha@tdh.state.tx.us](mailto:paul.mcgaha@tdh.state.tx.us).

Despite the delay in getting flu vaccine, the Public Health Nursing Program in Public Health Regions 4/5 North were able to **provide more than 40 special influenza, pneumococcal, and adult Td clinics, mostly during January and February.** Several of these clinics targeted elderly African-Americans as part of the regional special initiative for this year. All 13 of the field offices had specified days that flu and pneumococcal vaccines were offered in the office. *For more information contact Sharon Flournoy, Director of Nursing at (903) 533-5218 or e-mail at [Sharon.flournoy@tdh.state.tx.us](mailto:Sharon.flournoy@tdh.state.tx.us).*

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## **Public Health Region 6/5 South**

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**Montgomery County** experienced an 88% decrease in reported cases of meningococcal disease in March (1 case), compared to January (8 cases). The number of Montgomery County cases in February (2 cases) was 75% fewer than in January (8 cases). Following the identification of two Montgomery County community outbreaks in the New Caney ISD boundary and Conroe area, the Montgomery County Health Department and Texas Department of Health vaccinated over 50,000 individuals at increased risk in accordance with CDC guidelines in the month of January. *For more information contact Dr. Mark Guidry, Regional Director, PHR 6/5 South at (713) 767-3019 or e-mail [mark.guidry@tdh.state.tx.us](mailto:mark.guidry@tdh.state.tx.us); or contact Dr. Huai Lin at (713) 767-3232 or e-mail [huai.lin@tdh.state.tx.us](mailto:huai.lin@tdh.state.tx.us).*

On February 8<sup>th</sup> and 9<sup>th</sup>, Region 6/5 South Zoonosis Control Program personnel participated in several media interviews aimed at **educating citizens in the community about bat activity** in the **Harris County** and **Chambers County** school districts. As a result of bat exposures, ten humans are currently under-going rabies post exposure prophylaxis. The Zoonosis Control Program has worked closely with the Harris County Health Department and officials in the school districts involved to identify people who had potential bat exposures. *For information contact Dana Wiltz-Beckham, Zoonosis Control Program Manager at (713) 767-3300 or e-mail [dana.beckham@tdh.state.tx.us](mailto:dana.beckham@tdh.state.tx.us).*

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## **Public Health Region 7**

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Public Health Nurses in **Limestone County** are currently working with the **Limestone County Extension Agent on the Pathways to Health Project**. A Texas Department of Health (TDH) Innovation grant is funding this project. The grant funds are being used to mail Healthwise handbooks for a guide to self-care to the 8,800 households in **Limestone County**. Mailing of those books began mid-March 2001. It is the goal of this project to reduce the number of unnecessary emergency room and physician visits. TDH public health nurses have been actively involved on the Steering and Education

Committees planning for the dissemination of information about the project. Once every household receives the books, the public health nurses will be conducting group and individual trainings to help improve the practice of self-care through utilization of the Healthwise handbook. The nurses are planning to reach individuals in local faith groups, senior citizen centers, schools, community organizations and local businesses. The Healthwise book is available in both English and Spanish. In addition to the Healthwise handbook, the nurses will use a Healthwise computer program to provide expanded information/educational material in their Healthwise teaching. *For more information contact Patricia Collins at (254) 778-6744 or e-mail [patricia.collins@tdh.state.tx.us](mailto:patricia.collins@tdh.state.tx.us).*

This past January, the **Public Health Nutrition Program** invited applications from nonprofit schools to develop or begin nutrition and physical activity programs to address child obesity. With the help of staff from the Region 7 Public Health Nursing and the Community and Worksite Wellness programs, the Regional Nutritionist disseminated the grant to over 40 school nurses and administrators. As a result, Region 7 schools received 9 out of 10 grants (statewide). Many of the grantees were awarded monies for the first time. This gave the grantees (mostly school nurses) the needed resources to integrate nutrition and physical activity education into part of the school curriculum. Since the grant was awarded, over 17 schools have asked for training in the Coordinated Approach to School Health (CATCH) program. Also, as a result of increased interest in the role of nutrition in health, some community leaders are making plans to build community gardens. There is an unprecedented demand for nutrition assessment and training in the region. These changes are a result of increased interest in the social and behavioral determinants of health. *For more information contact Joan Atkinson at (254) 778-6744 or e-mail [joan.atkinson@tdh.state.tx.us](mailto:joan.atkinson@tdh.state.tx.us).*

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## **Public Health Region 11**

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The **Regional Advisory Committee (RAC) Meeting** was held on February 1, hosted by the City of Laredo Health Department. A variety of updated reports on current eligibility and enrollment numbers, increased outreach funding, the Birch & Davis Call Center Remediation Plan and the Transition from Children with Special Health Care Needs to Children Health Insurance Program (CHIP) were given by the Bureau of Children's Health Insurance, Health Plan Systems & Services Director.

The Advisory Committee sent the following recommendations: to urge the legislature to ensure that there is adequate network coverage for Children with Special Health Care Needs; that the plans have an adequate number of dentists and psychologists and other mental health providers, that provider reimbursement be increased and that plan premium rates are increased to match those rates offered in Houston and other urban areas. *For more information contact Carol Cornelison, TexCare Partnership CHIP Regional Contract Manager/Health Plan Liaison at (956) 423-0130 or e-mail [Carol.Cornelison@tdh.state.tx.us](mailto:Carol.Cornelison@tdh.state.tx.us).*

Regular **communication has been established between Region 11 and the dean and faculty of the new University of Texas, Brownsville School of Public Health.**

Discussions to date have concentrated on specific areas in which the two organizations can develop long-term, cooperative projects. Priorities include strengthened analysis of infectious disorders such as tuberculosis, arboviruses, rickettsial disease, hepatitis C, and antibiotic resistance; as well as chronic disorders such as obesity, hypertension, and diabetes. Interaction will expand as the campus facilities are completed and faculty recruited. *For more information contact Richard Campman, Epidemiologist at (956) 423-0130 or e-mail [Richard.Campman@tdh.state.tx.us](mailto:Richard.Campman@tdh.state.tx.us).*

Region 11 will be collaborating with the **Migrant Clinician's Network** in their **\$1 million promotora outreach** in selected colonias. On February 15, regional director met with the lead investigators from the University of Arizona and Mollie Williams of Migrant Clinician's Network (MCN) to discuss the support of public health. This important project will target selected colonias for major community intervention in exercise, nutrition education, and diabetes education, and compare them to similar colonias without the intervention. *For more information contact Dr. Brian Smith, Regional Director at (956) 423-0130 or e-mail [Brian.Smith@tdh.state.tx.us](mailto:Brian.Smith@tdh.state.tx.us).*

On February 22, one of our Community Oriented Public Health (COPH) contractors, the El Milagro Clinic in **McAllen**, celebrated the **official opening of the University of Texas Medical Branch (UTMB) Center** in their joint facility with the UTMB president in attendance. In connection with the Texas A & M University (TAMU) health center president and vice-president they also accepted a \$238,000 check from the **City of McAllen** for the clinic and health training with the TAMU, School of Rural Public Health. The city and county are actively promoting this facility to meet some of the indigent care needs of **Hidalgo County**. *For more information contact Dr. Brian Smith, Regional Director at (956) 423-0130 or e-mail [Brian.Smith@tdh.state.tx.us](mailto:Brian.Smith@tdh.state.tx.us).*

Dr. Katharine M. Donato, and Dr. Michael O. Emerson, Associate Professors with **Houston School of Public Health, Rice University** are interested in **promoting relationships with public health in south Texas and the Mexican health departments**, especially as the University of Texas In Brownsville field site has opened with Dr. Joe McCormick and Dr. Sue Fischer-Hoch on February 28. The first group of 23 students from Rice had what they perceived as an eye-opening experience in international health as they discussed border health issues with us and then traveled to visit health departments and hospitals in **Matamoros**. As another part of our effort to promote Texas Department of Health and develop partnerships to student health professionals, selected programs have just completed teaching segments in public health at University of Texas Pan American. The course has been so effective that their supervising branch at UTMB declared the course to be better than the one taught in Galveston for Physicians Assistants. *For more information contact Domingo Navarro, TB Elimination Program Manager at (956) 423-0130 or e-mail [Domingo.Navarro@tdh.state.tx.us](mailto:Domingo.Navarro@tdh.state.tx.us).*